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CHICAGO TRIBUNE
 8 September 1986

U.S., Soviets talking, but it's just words

By Terry Atlas
 Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON—In Moscow, in Washington, and in neutral locales such as Geneva, this is the season of superpower dialogue.

Americans and Soviets are talking about arms control, about regional hot spots, about human rights and the myriad other issues of common interest or, more often, fundamental disagreement.

Arnold Horelick, a Rand Corporation expert on the Soviet Union, said this activity reflects the political and diplomatic "re-engagement" underway between the two nations—a tentative and fragile process imperiled by the dispute over the detention in Moscow of American journalist Nicholas Daniloff on what the U.S. regards as "trumped up" spy accusations.

"Whether this diplomatic re-engagement can be sustained long enough to alter substantially the political environment of the relationship, what concrete results it can produce, particularly in

arms control, and what shape the U.S.-Soviet relationship will ultimately assume, all remain highly uncertain," said Horelick, formerly the CIA's top Soviet analyst.

The Reagan administration last week calibrated its initial response to Daniloff's seizure by the KGB to avoid prematurely scuttling the schedule of diplomatic discussions intended as a prelude to a summit this winter between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Administration officials said Saturday that Reagan has sent a personal message to Gorbachev appealing for Daniloff's release and warning that failure to free him might harm future U.S.-Soviet relations.

In the last week, U.S. and Soviet experts huddled as scheduled in neutral Switzerland over

Daniloff for Zakharov.

Upon learning of the charges, Mrs. Daniloff said, "I'm terribly disappointed, but I'm taking heart from President Reagan's letter." She was referring to a message Reagan sent last week to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev asking that her husband be freed.

Trimble said Daniloff's voice during the 20-minute telephone call sounded strained, and that the jailed correspondent said he did not believe he was entitled to legal representation at this stage of the proceedings.

"Nick said he would like to see a solution in which charges against him are dropped in order to clear his name here," Trimble said. He was not sure if Daniloff was rejecting any exchange plan or simply stating that he wants his reputation cleared.

Meanwhile Pravda, the Communist Party newspaper, claimed Daniloff worked for the CIA, and that the United States was using the case as an excuse to frustrate Soviet-U.S. talks.

Pravda suggested that the U.S. uproar over Daniloff's detention showed a "need to divert attention both from Soviet peace-loving initiatives and from the policy of Washington aimed at committing the robbery of the century: To rob mankind of the hope of a world without nuclear weapons and suicidal war."

The official news agency Tass also called the outcry over Daniloff "a diversionary theme" and said Western news media have made him "the hero of the day."

"But what we have here is the case of a run-of-the-mill, not even very big spy caught in the act," Tass said.

Pravda said, "Now when invisible servants of the CIA are revealed, as it was for example with American spy N. Daniloff . . . they on the Potomac have started an ardent press ballyhoo."

"Even leading officials up to the head of the State Department Mr. Shultz are not squeamish about joining this farcical chorus," the paper said. "They even hint at possible sanctions against Moscow: For example they are threatening to frustrate important diplomatic meetings between the U.S.S.R and the U.S."

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